

Introduction

– the purpose of this book



We have a suspicion that either you know your T4s and are specifically looking for a given model, or you want a Camper and have heard that a VW is your best bet.

In the case of the former and without detriment to the latter, we've both been around VWs for a long time and think we can suggest what's best and what's not quite so good – even if it seems like a good idea. We'll detail the years when the T4 was produced, and when those we consider to be the models that tick all the boxes were introduced. Inevitably, we'll concentrate on those VWs we've seen that are either standard, or closer to original spec than the fully-customised offerings. On the other hand, we'll also point out what's good and bad to look for if your dream is someone else's bespoke creation.



This long-nose Caravelle was clearly bought for its luxury specification and ability to carry a large family of passengers.

If your goal is ownership of a VW Camper, hopefully we can guide you towards the *crème de la crème*, both in terms of base models and conversion companies, not to mention the enormous coach-built bodies gently lowered onto a chassis cab. We'll tell you why a T4 is more practical than even its immediate predecessor, and certainly why – lovely though they are – the split-screen and bay-window can't offer what a T4 can. We'll also discuss many an enthusiast's view that a good T4 is a much better buy than its successor, the T5. We'll hover around home-spun conversions at least briefly, too.

Beware, however, of VW's reputation as being a cut above many of its competitors in terms of build quality and reliability, and of its proven Camper



The freedom of a home on wheels in T4 guise attracts many buyers. This example illustrates the shorter front that was available when the T4 launched.



It's not totally unrealistic to purchase a T4 for your business needs. VW T4s have long lives.

3 Living with a T4

– will you get along together?



First of all, is a T4 suitable as a daily driver? Most might consider an example built in the early '90s a little elderly for such a role, but certainly – at the time of publication – to see a later T4 performing duties as a school bus, or acting as a workhorse for butcher, baker or builder is not out of the ordinary. If it's a diesel, even with in excess of 100,000 miles on the clock, there are many, many thousands of miles left in it.

Of course, at least half of you are not in the market for a T4 as a daily driver. You are looking for a Camper, a vehicle likely to be used during an extended summer period (probably stretching from Easter to the end of November), at weekends and for holidays. Considering we would argue that a VW Camper 30 years older than the most elderly T4 is okay for such purposes, we would say VW's fourth generation model is ideal for you.

Although larger than the average car, even in long-wheelbase guise the T4 isn't so enormous that garaging it is nigh-on impossible (there is an exception, and that's the coach-built body models mounted on a chassis cab, but few would even contemplate trying to squeeze such a vehicle into a domestic garage). We'd suggest that a vehicle likely to be off the road in the depths of winter should enjoy the comforts of a dry garage or a car-port – and, yes, many enthusiasts build one or the other in a manner designed to cope with fixed high roofs, or the added centimetres of an elevating roof.



The T4 was the first VW Transporter to feature short- and long-wheelbase options. Here's an LWB option with plenty of legroom.



A lovely T4 short-wheelbase Delivery Van, ripe for use as it was built, or for conversion into a Camper.

Rust-proofing treatment had moved on in leaps and bounds from the days of the T4's predecessor. Key was the notion that treatment was applied during manufacture and encompassed internal body sections and panels. Post '96, and the introduction of the long-nose model, most agree that further improvements in tin worm avoidance had taken place. It's fair to say that, generally, unless a T4 has been neglected for a number of years, or involved in an accident and shoddily repaired, serious rust is not likely to be a problem. Also, from '96 onwards, the front wings were bolted on, making accident damage in that vicinity easier to repair.

When the T4 was launched, VW made great play of the safety features built-in as standard. They proclaimed the merits of "a rigid 'safety cell' with crumple zones to absorb crash energy, and side impact protection." Additionally, components of the chassis and body were deformable and, of course, the steering column was collapsible. However, VW also shouted that the "precise" design of both chassis and suspension, aided "directional stability." Disc brakes were cited, as was the invariably optional extra of ABS and traction control – possibly things we take for granted today, but then by no means universal.

With usage, life expectancy and health and safety discussed, how about some basics; all Volkswagens sport air-cooled engines and are rear-wheel drive, right? Wrong on all counts: the T4 was the first Transporter to sport a front-mounted engine and front-wheel drive, as per the VW Golf, Polo, Passat etc, etc. It was also the second model of Transporter to carry a water-cooled engine, and the second to be offered with diesel options. It was the second to offer VW's synchro all-wheel drive system as an option, and the third to make the left foot redundant with one form or another of automatic transmission. To date it is unique in Transporter history in terms of having a new front end devised but the old design not becoming a thing of the past.



The Colorado, coach-built in Germany by Karmann, is a fine example of the spacious and comfortable Campers readily available on a T4 Chassis Cab.



Reimo and many others produced high-specification traditional Campers based on the SWB T4. The 2.5TDI engine ensures reasonable power and economy.